

COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM
TOM DAVIS, CHAIRMAN



MEDIA ADVISORY

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Government Reform to Review Proposals for
Bringing Voting Rights to the District of Columbia

Four Legislative Remedies to be Evaluated

What: Government Reform Committee oversight hearing:
“Common Sense Justice for the Nation's Capital: An Examination of Proposals to Give D.C. Residents Direct Representation”

When: WEDNESDAY, June 23, 2004, 10:00 a.m.

Where: ROOM 2154, RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

Background:

Residents of the District of Columbia fight in wars, pay federal income taxes, and have the same benefits and responsibilities as their fellow U.S. citizens save one: They do not have a direct, elected, voting voice in Congress.

In creating the District of Columbia, the framers of the Constitution envisioned a special enclave that would exist primarily as the seat of the federal government. That vision is at odds with modern Washington: a vibrant city with more than 550,000 residents, an elected Mayor and City Council, and its own police force, fire department, school system and other local services. Chairman Davis believes it is time that the people of the District had a vote in Congress, too.

This hearing will examine the various legislative remedies that have been offered to address the District of Columbia's lack of Congressional representation. Over the years, various strategies have been advanced to provide District residents with the Congressional representation enjoyed by other citizens of the United States – including a Constitutional Amendment that passed the Congress in 1978 but did not receive ratification from the states.

In the 108th Congress, four specific legislative solutions have been offered to address this situation. Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) has introduced H.R. 1285, which would treat the District as a state, giving it two Senators and one House seat in the Congress. Representative Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA) has offered H.R. 3709, which would allow District residents to vote with the citizens of the state of Maryland in both U.S. House and Senate elections. Representative Ralph Regula (R-OH) has introduced a bill, H.R. 381, which would provide for the retrocession of most of the District of Columbia to Maryland.

After studying the various plans and the history of the effort to increase direct representation for District citizens, Chairman Davis has developed his own proposal. Chairman Davis's measure would treat D.C. as a Congressional District and allow the citizens of the District to elect a full, voting Member of Congress. To provide for a politically neutral increase, Davis' bill would increase the size of the U.S. House by two seats to 437 – one seat for the District and one for the state next in line for an additional seat – for the remainder of this decennial period. The state next in line for an additional seat is Utah, a state with two Republican Senators and two of three current congressional seats held by Republicans. A Democrat would almost certainly be elected from the District, where Republicans make up only 7 percent of the electorate. Thus, the two seat increase would have no net effect on the balance of power in the U.S. House.

All four of these plans share one central theme, the authority granted to Congress in Article I, Section 8 of the Constitution, otherwise known as the District Clause, which provides that Congress has the power to “exercise exclusive Legislation in all Cases whatsoever, over” the District. The Committee plans to examine that power in the context of providing voting representation in Congress.

Through this hearing, the Committee hopes to initiate a broad discussion of the options and facilitate a full understanding of the issues, including the scope of the District Clause, the historical place of the District in our system of government, and practical and political concerns. A thorough discussion of these plans will provide a starting point to assess the most appropriate way to provide District residents with voting representation in the United States Congress.

WITNESSES

Representative Ralph Regula, (R-OH)

Representative Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA)

The Honorable Anthony A. Williams, Mayor of the District of Columbia

The Honorable Linda W. Cropp, Chairman, Council of the District of Columbia

Mr. Wade Henderson, Executive Director, Leadership Conference on Civil Rights

**The Honorable Kenneth W. Starr, Former Solicitor General of the United States
and former judge, U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit**

Mr. Ilir Zherka, Executive Director, DC Vote

**Mr. Walter Smith, Executive Director, The DC Appleseed Center for Law and
Justice**

Ms. Betsy W. Werronen, Chairman, District of Columbia Republican Committee

Mr. Ted Trabue, Greater Washington Board of Trade

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